

THE TELEGRAPH WIRE

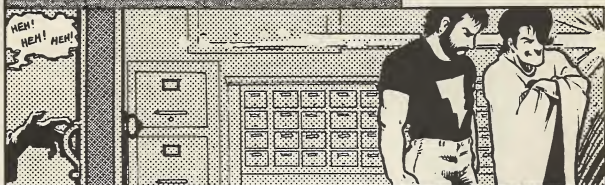
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ISSUE 19

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FIT TO BE TIED

EDITORIAL BY **DIANA SCHUTZ**

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This is *FIT TO BE TIED*, with thanks from me and Godzilla to our pal Larry Ruggiero who, while suffering from the flu, nonetheless managed to produce this badly-needed logo in the nick of time.

Just a few odd and sundry loose ends this time around, or not-quite-an-editorial:

Last issue I inadvertently slighted two people who have since become friends of mine. While disparaging the state of local comic shops, I complained about the lack of space at Collectors Comics in near-by Wantagh. Proprietors Laurie and Jim Wanser have gracefully conceded my point and are already hard at work redesigning their displays to afford their customers more room to move. What I neglected to mention is that Laurie and Jim are always conscientious about providing their clientele with friendly, helpful, and personal service--and that, folks, is really the bottom line.

This issue we say goodbye, regretfully, to Bob Schreck, the *WIRE*'s movie columnist and resident Godzilla fan. Bob is moving on to devote his full-time energies to Comico as their Advertising and Promotions Manager. All the best, Bob--and although I've just lost a columnist, I'd better not have lost my regular date for the movies or I'll really be peeved!

If you're interested in collectible plastics, The Society for Decorative Plastics is currently publishing a very informative bimonthly newsletter on the subject. I recently received their second issue and learned everything I ever wanted to know about those beautiful old plastic bracelets that I love to dangle from my wrist. For those who would like to become members of the Society, dues are only \$4.00 per year and include a 6-issue subscription to their newsletter and one free classified ad in addition to a membership card. You can write to The

Society for Decorative Plastics at: P.O. Box 199, Guerneville, CA, 95446.

The eagle-eye among you might notice that SDP's address is the same as that of Eclipse Comics. Curious coincidence, huh?

While I'm in the mood for plugs, those one or two of you who aren't already reading *THE COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE* should really hop to it. Published every week, CBG just can't be beat for the most up-to-date news and views on the comics industry. And you can get your first issue *free* just by writing to editors Don and Maggie Thompson at: *THE COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE*, 700 East State Street, Iola, WI, 54990.

The grapevine has it that, at the recent Glenwood Distributors meeting in Las Vegas, Mike Catron, Director of Publications for WaRP Graphics, announced to all present that he waits impatiently for each issue of *THE TELEGRAPH WIRE* to reach his doorstep, and he strongly encouraged all retailers in attendance to follow Comics & Comix' example and begin similar newsletters of their own. Yow! Thanks for the kind words, Mike. Am I blushing yet?

That grapevine is sure fertile these days. One rumor that's recently floated my way is that I've gotten married and moved to Philadelphia. Well, if so, I'm the last to find out! That's right, boys, you can rest easy--this gal's still single!

Before signing off, let me leave you with a thought for the day, courtesy of William Burroughs: LANGUAGE IS A VIRUS FROM OUTER SPACE. (It's unfortunate that a large percentage of the planet's population hasn't caught the bug yet.)

THE TELEGRAPH WIRE #19, February/March 1985. Published bimonthly by Comics and Comix, Inc. Office of Publication: 69 Carnation Road, Levittown, NY, 11756. Copyright (C) 1985 individual contributors. All rights reserved. Subscriptions: \$5.00/six issues. Publisher: John Barrett. Editor: Diana Schutz. Cover Logo: Tom Drzechowski. Cover Illustration: Arthur Adams and Mike Mignola. Longshot and Rocket Raccoon are (C) Marvel Comics Group. Printed at Western Offset in San Diego. All information contained herein is accurate to the best of our knowledge. This issue's for you, J.B., with thanks for pulling me out from under.

EGCENTRIC EVOLUTIONS

by JOHN BARRETT
PUBLISHER

'Tis the season for changes... In the last installment of this column my report was dotted with hints of gloom and doom. However, at this writing, Christmas has come and gone, leaving better than anticipated presents. Our toy sales were particularly outstanding, but the big surprise came with new comics sales. Holiday seasons in the past were never strong times for new comics sales, partly because new comics haven't traditionally been regarded as gift items and, at the same time, the regular comics buyers cut back to make room in their budget for gifts. This year the regulars' trimmings were offset by the introduction of a number of strong new titles: CRISIS ON INFINITE EARTHS, T.H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS, and MACROSS, to name just a few. However, the big gains came from the seasonal shoppers. With the introduction of the "transforming" robot toys to the national scene, parents were accompanied to the stores in droves by their children to alleviate the adults' fear of buying the wrong gift item. The youngsters in tow were frequently treated to TRANSFORMERS, SUPERMAN, G.I. JOE, one of the newly introduced Star line of children-oriented comics, or some other easily recognizable title. Other buyers were picking up new comics as gifts and "stocking stuffers." All in all, it added up to great sales with a promise of more to come through the broadened exposure and the hope that some of these new faces will return over the course of the new year to buy their new-found sources of entertainment.

Another phenomenon I've been observing of late is the second generation of Comics & Comix customers. Many of the young adults who began shopping with us

as far back as 1972 now have families of their own. Frequently they are buying extra comics for their children's enjoyment (and yes, sometimes as a diversion to keep the sticky-fingered wee ones from "de-minting" their own copies!) as well as for an investment towards the inevitable costs of higher education and so on. Many of the youngsters are accompanying their parent(s) and it's fun to observe the delight expressed in each of their faces as they discover some new favorite issue. Marvel's Star comics are a timely arrival for capitalizing on this "new" market. These books are aimed at the under eight-year old set (so don't criticize them based on your own likes or dislikes) and should help groom the future generations of comics readers.

In other changes, Ed Shukin has left Marvel and gone to DC. His name probably wouldn't be recognized by the average comics fan as he is neither an artist nor writer. He does play a major role in the industry, however, and will be installed in a newly created position to shore up DC's badly flagging newsstand distribution and sales. Good luck, Ed.

I'll soon be heading off to the Glenwood trade show in Las Vegas (and no, I'm not going to put it all on the red!) and should return armed with information on the various publishers' projects for 1985. Look for notes to that end here next time.

P.S. Last time I referred to how winter depressed me and I was glad I didn't live in Denver. This prompted a call from good friend Chuck Rozanski of Mile High Comics to let me know it was warm and sunny there. It just occurred to me that 1984 was leap year...!

Comics & Comix

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II

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#87 #88 #89 #90 #91 #92

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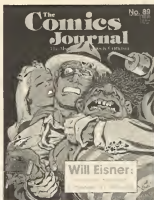
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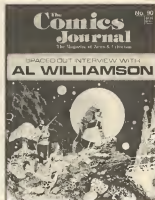
■ **THE COMICS JOURNAL #87**
Buyer's Guide columnist HEIDI MACDONALD examines comics' endless fight scenes; interviews with PHIL YEH and GEORGE METZGER; reviews of *Everett True*, *American Flag!*; Archie Comics, more; a background artist speaks; great gag fight-scene cover illo by DON ROSA!



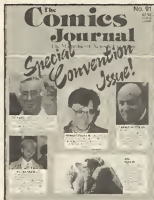
■ **THE COMICS JOURNAL #88**
The controversy on rating comics is explored with an editorial, a letters section, and two panels involving JIM SHOOTER, ARCHIE GOODWIN, DEAN MULLANEY, RICH BUCKLER, MIKE GOLD, and others; reviews of *Kool-Aid Man*, *Nexus*, *Zippy*, *Knockabout Comics*, *Vigilante*, and more.



■ **THE COMICS JOURNAL #89**
WILL EISNER featured with two interviews and an original color cover; acid review of Marvel's Assistant Editor's month; FRANK MILLER, CHRIS CLAREMONT, WENDY PINI on panels; the best and worst of 1983 reviewed; critiques of *Eino*, *Sword of the Atom*, and *Star Raiders*.



■ **THE COMICS JOURNAL #90**
AL WILLIAMSON interviewed, with full-color Williamson cover; an essay on *Twisted Tales*; a column by HARLAN ELLISON; Japanese comics; the Eclipse line; letters from STEVE BISSETTE and FRANK MILLER; *Nathaniel Dusk*, *Cerebus* and *RAW* reviewed; plus news, and more.



■ **THE COMICS JOURNAL #91**
Special convention issue, publishing panels featuring artists (KANE, SIENKIEWICZ, SIM, KUBERT, CHAYKIN, et al.), editors (GOLD, GOODWIN, et al.), writers (JONES, WOLFGAN, et al.), and a special interview with HARVEY KURTZMAN! Plus reviews, letters, columns, and much more!



■ **THE COMICS JOURNAL #92**
Are undergrounds dead? Features interviews with GILBERT SHELTON and LEONARD RIFAS, a column by DENIS KITCHEN, more. Also, the death of Western Comics, HARLAN ELLISON, the pros' summer reading, news stories on Marvel's controversial art vaults, and much more!

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MAIN LINES

The first exhibition of the Cartoon Art Museum of California has opened at the San Francisco International Airport. The exhibit, located at the Gate 76 Gallery in the airport's north terminal, runs until March 10. Original cartoon art by contemporary comic strip artists Charles Schulz (PEANUTS), Oik Browne (HAGAR THE HORRIBLE), and Jim Davis (GAFFIELO), as well as by earlier masters Clifford McBride (NAPOLEON), George McManus (JIGGS AND MAGGIE), Al Capp (LI'L ABNER), and Milton Caniff (STEVE CANYON) are just a few of the many fascinating works on display.

In addition to daily and Sunday newspaper comic strip art, the exhibit includes examples of original magazine and editorial cartoons and comic book art.

This show is the first in a series of Museum-sponsored exhibits appearing in the Bay Area at various locations.

In other exhibit news, in recognition of the 35th anniversary of PEANUTS, the Oakland Museum is organizing "The Graphic Art of Charles Schulz," an exhibition which will open to the public on May 19. The exhibit will feature more than 100 original pen-and-ink drawings done between 1950 and 1985, as well as videotapes covering the animated film and TV specials, color animation cels, and selected PEANUTS memorabilia. The exhibit will run through August 31 before travelling to other locations.

Oeni Loubert has resigned her position as Secretary of Aardvark-Vanaheim and Publisher of the A-V line of comic books, effective April 1, 1985. Loubert will form her own company, Renegade Press. By mutual agreement with Aardvark-Vanaheim President, Dave Sim, she will take over the publishing of former A-V titles, MS. TREE, NORMALMAN, FLAMING CARROT,



Renegade Press will be publishing VALENTINO, a collection of tales from the creator of normalman. Scheduled for release in April.

ZOT! CHARTING THE UNIVERSE OF RISING STAR SCOTT McLOUD

COMICS #18

WRITTEN BY CAROL KALISH
DRAWN BY AL THE GREAT ONE

COMICS
interview

ROO REED
WRITER OF THE
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DEAVE METAL ARTIST
ARTIST BOYDRAK
WRITER SMOOT MUSIC, HOSTS A MICHIGAN

\$2.25 U.S. CAN. \$4

COMICS INTERVIEW #18 features ZOT! creator Scott McCloud.

Zot (C) Silver Linings

and NEIL THE HORSE, as well as the recently-announced BLACK ZEPPELIN and WOROSMITH.

Aardvark-Vanaheim will continue to publish CEREBUS, SWORDS OF CEREBUS, and CEREBUS JAM.

There will be no break in any of the publishing schedules involved.

Continuing with the business side of funnybooks, several publishers have recently announced the hiring of new personnel in their respective organizations.

Linda Robak has joined DC Comics as Advertising and Sales Manager. Her responsibilities include working with DC's non-returnable distributors, implementing specialty store programs and promotions, supervising monthly order solicitations, and advertising and promoting DC's line of comic books.

Responding to its new position as the largest volume producer of independent comics, Eclipse has created the new post of Sales Manager and Marketing Director, and has named James Hudnall to fill that berth. Hudnall, 27, is a California native who for the past seven years has been a computer software consultant. During the last four years he has headed a successful software consulting firm in the Northwest.

And finally, Bob Schreck has joined Comico as Advertising and Promotions Manager. His duties include co-ordinating Comico's advertising campaign, organizing the personal appearance program, and promoting the company's line of comics. Schreck, formerly of Creation Conventions and Marvel Comics, has also been the WIRE's movie columnist since the summer of '84 and our loss is Comico's gain. Best of luck, Bob!

WarP Graphics has announced two new titles for 1985. Martin Greim and Brian Buriak's THUNDERBUNNY is the first on the list, scheduled for release in February. The title has already been seen in several

incarnations: its first appearance was in COMIC CRUSADERS STORYBOOK, published in the mid-'70s. It then saw print in CHARLTON BULLSEYE and, most recently, under the Archie Comics aegis.

The second new WaRP title for 1985 is UNICORN ISLE, a 12-issue maxi-series written by Lee Marrs, with art by Paul Chadwick. Marrs' work has been seen in EPIC ILLUSTRATED, HEAVY METAL, STAR*REACH, and WIMMEN'S COMIX, both as writer and artist. Chadwick has been a major-studio storyboard artist and has illustrated numerous covers for science fiction books.

Described by Marrs as a "fairy tale with teeth," UNICORN ISLE is set to debut in March.

Both of WaRP's new titles will be 32-page black-and-white comics, published bimonthly, with a cover price of \$1.50.

Having originally seen print as MACROSS, Comico's Japanese-influenced comic will undergo a title change beginning with issue #2. The new title is MACROSS: THE SAGA OF ROBOTTECH.

In addition to the title change, there will also be changes in the book's creative team. Joining regular writer Carl Macek and breakdown artist Svea Stauch will be Neil Vokes on finished pencils and Rich Rankin on inks. Vokes' art can be seen on "The Falconer" in PRIMER #7. Rankin is the inker on Comico's best-selling ELEMENTALS.

In early spring, MACROSS will be joined by two more ROBOTTECH titles showcasing popular Japanese characters. No details were available at press time.

Over at First Comics, Jon Eddings, an art teacher for the Iowa school system, has been named new penciller of STARSAYER as of issue #31, on sale in April. John Ostrander and Mark Nelson remain writer and inker, respectively, on the series.

Premiering in February, also from First, is SHATTER,



(C) Greim and Bunjak

THUNDERBUNNY returns to the racks in February, courtesy of WaRP Graphics.

a booklength one-shot special, produced entirely on an Apple Macintosh computer. The creation of artist Michael Saenz and writer Peter Gillis, SHATTER will be printed on Baxter paper with painted color. At the same time as it is released under its own title, it will also appear as a short-run eight-page feature in JON SABLE, FREELANCE.

Eclipse has signed a contract with GRIMJACK artist Timothy Truman to publish KILLER...TALES BY TIMOTHY TRUMAN, a special one-shot presenting all-Truman art.

The lead feature is the much-requested "Darl the Wanderer" story drawn by Tim and written by Gardner Fox. Originally slated for Pacific's VANGUARD, "Darl" marks Gardner's triumphant return to comics.

Rounding out the issue are two Truman stories which appeared in black-and-white in TSR's role-playing strategy magazines, as well as a portfolio gallery by Truman and his cover oil painting of Ares the War God. KILLER...TALES BY TIMOTHY TRUMAN is a laser-scanned Baxter book and ships in April.

THE WEST COAST AVENGERS, fresh from a successful four-issue limited series, will receive their own monthly title beginning in 1985, courtesy of AVENGERS alumni Steve Englehart, Al Milgrom, and Joe Sinnott.

Englehart will also write a 12-issue VISION AND SCARLET WITCH limited series, illustrated by Richard Howell. Both will debut with special double-size issues leading into a crossover story in their second issues.

And for those of you who didn't get enough of it the first time around, SECRET WARS II premieres in April, continuing the story of the infinitely powerful Beyonder in a plot line that will weave its way in and out of almost every Marvel title. A nine-issue limited series, SECRET WARS II will be written by Jim Shooter, pencilled by Al Milgrom (not Sal Buscema, as previously reported elsewhere), and inked by Steve Leialoha.



(C) Timothy Truman

Tim Truman's KILLER to be published in April by Eclipse.



(C) Marrs and Chadwick

A page from the upcoming UNICORN ISLE by Lee Marrs and Paul Chadwick, to be published by WaRP Graphics.



(C) Marvel Comics Group

A sample of Richard Howell's Vision and Scarlet Witch for the upcoming limited series.



I grew up!

But my favorite comic book didn't.

Sure I used to read comics. Just about all my friends did too. Comics were a lot of fun . . . when we were kids.

But the older I got, the more childish those comics became. The plots were the same, month after month. The artwork looked like it had been made in a factory instead of drawn in a studio. I was growing up, but the comic books I read were not.

So I stopped reading them. I left my favorite funny book behind, along with my toys and my childhood.

Then, one day, a friend told me about the new comics. Modern comics. Comics with good art. Full laser-scanned color. Magazine quality white paper. And best of all, these new comics featured new heroes, new concepts, and a new kind of commitment to excellence.

I was amazed. During the time I was gone from comics, they had grown up too. Just like I did.

Yes, I rediscovered comics. But not just any comics. I discovered Eclipse Comics. With the Eclipse logo on the cover, I can be sure that the comics I read are grown up. Just like me.



YOU'RE NOT A KID ANYMORE.



THE PASSING OF PACIFIC, THE DAWN OF ECLIPSE: Pacific Comics claims to have "suspended publication," but from the looks of things, I'd say they're gone for good. Which is a shame, because during their short existence they produced some truly fine, groundbreaking material, some of the best being ELRIC, SOMERSET HOLMES, Corben's Poe adaptation, and ROCKETEER. They were one of the companies to lead the way for the new wave of independent publishers and they succeeded in luring many big name artists and writers away from Marvel and DC, something unheard of only a few years ago. And for as long as they lasted, their presence suggested a robust and growing industry and gave one reason to believe that a line of comics aimed at a predominantly adult market was not only possible, but supremely viable.

At the same time, Pacific seemed to be a company in search of a direction. While they published some excellent series and pioneered some of the ultra-slick formats we are already beginning to take for granted, they also saw fit to publish books that we could have easily lived without, such as BOLD ADVENTURE, VANGUARD, and VANITY. While the serious cash-flow problems with their distribution arm is the reason given for suspending their color comics line, it really seemed to me that they were publishing books willy-nilly without giving much thought to the realities of the still untested direct sales market. Books like FIRST FOLIO and VANGUARD, which depended heavily on so-called "new talent," would have been missed by no one except the contributors. Instead of publishing embryonic talents in deluxe glossy formats, Pacific could have pooled that money into, say, publishing their proposed Berni Wrightson graphic novel, *Freakshow*. They could just as easily have passed on adolescent sex-tease books like VANITY; notice that no other publishers are rushing to pick this one up (though I wouldn't be surprised if it turned up at Americomics, considering how they specialize in that sort of thing).

When First Comics formed, they devised a growth plan which limited them to three new titles per year, and First is still with us, seemingly strong. Pacific, however, just kept publishing marginal books worth nowhere near the \$1.50 they were asking. I was very interested, for example, in Gilbert and Loeb's "Mr. Monster," but it appeared in VANGUARD, sandwiched between utterly forgettable "new talent" material and pro material which probably shouldn't have been published either. No way was I going to blow \$1.50 for 10 pages of comics. Now Eclipse is coming out with their edition of MR. MONSTER, combining the second chapter with the reprinted and re-colored first chapter originally published by Pacific. For that, I will gladly pay \$1.50 or \$1.75.

I was delighted, in fact, to see Eclipse picking up all but a few of Pacific's unpublished titles, especially SOMERSET HOLMES and ROCKETEER. But with the publication of books like STRANGE DAYS, AXEL PRESSBUTTON, and SIEGEL AND SHUSTER: OATELINE 1930s, I fear that Eclipse may be overextending themselves in the same manner Pacific did. Maybe these books sold well, and I sincerely hope they did, but for my money, STRANGE DAYS, despite its intricate, fever dream artwork and tongue-in-cheek decadence, leaves me cold; AXEL PRESSBUTTON is competent but all too typical of the British school of mayhem comics, and lord knows I've seen enough spaceships and robots; and SIEGEL AND SHUSTER, well, I respect the men for their creation of Superman and everything, but beyond that, who cares?

Most everything else they're publishing, with the possible exceptions of THE MASKED MAN and SUN-RUNNERS, seems pretty interesting, and who knows...but the collapse of Pacific may be just the shot-in-the-arm Eclipse needed. And there's no question that the demise of Pacific has succeeded in easing the direct market glut considerably. For awhile there, with so many good books going for \$1.50, it was tough deciding between them, or even keeping up with them all.

Eclipse appears to be healthy and pretty close to staying on schedule (something Pacific was never able to achieve), and I hope they continue to grow and prosper. Still, when a company like Pacific, loaded with big talents, slick formats, and seemingly on the rise, can disappear in the wink of an eye, it's difficult to feel secure about any of the companies, except, of course, you know who.

According to an item in THE COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE, WILL EISNER'S QUARTERLY #3 completely sold out. Superficially, this could be construed as a sign that comic fans are slowly acquiring a taste for some of the finer works of comic art, but...did the issue sell well because more fans have suddenly discovered Will Eisner, or was the interview with the late Phil Seuling the reason for the sell-out? I suspect the latter is true; everyone interested in modern comics should read this final interview with Seuling, but one would like to think that anyone buying the issue solely for this reason, having not read the first two issues, would read not only the interview but the third chapter of Eisner's continuing graphic novel, "A Life Force," as well. They might find it's possible to convey emotional action with comics, not just physical action, and they might even decide to forego those extra copies of TEEN TITANS and X-MEN and put WILL EISNER'S QUARTERLY on their list of

regular purchases.

And speaking of TEEN TITANS, did y'all catch the little bas-relief of Pogo on page 1 of TALES OF THE TEEN TITANS #50? Pretty cute, George. Pretty cute. See you at the racks.

Mark Burbey has written about comics and film for such publications as RBCC, CASCADE COMIX MONTHLY, CINEMACABRE, and SWANK, is a contributor to THE COMICS JOURNAL, and wrote THE MARVEL GUIDE TO COLLECTING COMICS. He has also had a number of stories published in DR. WIRTHAM'S COMIX & STORIES.

Comics & Comix Calendar

Spin your own discount with the WHEEL OF FORTUNE! Discounts are good all day on all Comics & Comix merchandise. This popular event returns to the following Comics & Comix locations on these days:

Saturday, February 2nd	- Citrus Heights
Saturday, February 9th	- Lombard Street, S.F.
Saturday, February 16th	- Solano Mall
Saturday, February 23rd	- Palo Alto
Saturday, March 2nd	- Sacramento
Saturday, March 9th	- Berkeley
Saturday, March 16th	- Irving Street, S.F.

Super special deals can be had at the ever-popular Comics & Comix NO MINIMUM BID AUCTION! Join down the following dates and times for some great savings:

Saturday, February 9th, 4 - 6 p.m.	- Palo Alto
Friday, February 22nd, 8 - 10 p.m.	- Citrus Heights



Photo courtesy Steve Englehart

Comics & Comix is pleased to present super scribe STEVE ENGLEHART on Saturday, February 23rd at our Solano Mall store in Fairfield, from noon to 3 p.m. One of the most talented writers in the business, Steve has scripted the likes of Batman, the Justice League of America, Dr. Strange, and the Avengers, among others. Currently, his talents can be found on Epic's COYOTE and DC's GREEN LANTERN, and his work on THE SILVER SURFER, VISION AND THE SCARLET WITCH, and WEST COAST AVENGERS will be hitting the stands soon. This is one event you can't afford to miss!



Contrary to the popular belief that Marvel and DC will not collaborate again, the two companies are scheduling a new crossover book featuring the King-pin, the Blob, Babe, and Bouncing Boy. The plot revolves around the four being trapped on an alien planet without food. Look for CRISIS OF INFINITE GIRTHS on sale soon.

Artist/writer Jim Starlin has said he has several changes in store for his ongoing Metamorphosis Odyssey epic. "The first significant change will be the replacement of lead character Vanth with Warner Brothers' popular cartoon wimp, Elmer Fudd. After that, I'll change the name of the book to QWEDOSTAR."

When Sherlock Holmes was asked by his assistant what his favorite new comic book was, the legendary detective replied, "ELEMENTALS, my dear Watson."

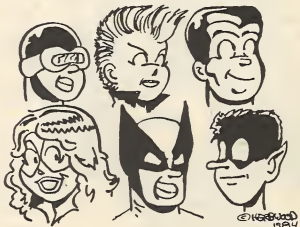
Galactus, on an eating rampage once again (after devouring Prince Namor for a Sub-Marine-r sandwich), recently grabbed longtime Micronauts member Bug, and then squished the helpless creature into a pan of graham cracker pieces.

"Yumm...I love grasshopper pie," said the big G after scarfing down his snack.

Applications for the new membership opening are now being accepted. Applicants must be small...real small.

SUPER-BOXERS II, a new graphic novel from Marvel, is due out this summer. Writer John Byrne says the plot will concentrate on the Thing's gigantic underwear.

And now, my friend Herb Wood and I leave you with this timeless question to ponder until we meet again: WHAT IF the Archie gang were the X-Men???



COMING FROM KITCHEN SINK PRESS!

Will Eisner's Quarterly No. 5

LIFE FORCE CONCLUDES!

Will Eisner's *Quarterly* No.5 will be off press in March. The new deluxe format—squarebound, heavy cover stock, expanded size and color section—retails for \$5.95. In this issue, Will Eisner's new serialized graphic novel, *A Life Force*, comes to its dramatic conclusion. Let us only say that Eisner's power as an artist and storyteller is at its peak in this work. The conclusion is spare in its narrative, lush in its characterization, sometimes violent, sometimes tender. What will happen to the immigrant Americans who live at 55 Dropsie Avenue, The Bronx? *W.E.C.*

No.5 has the answers... Also in this issue Cat Yronwode continues her look at the Quality Comics line and Eisner's studio in the early 1940s. Secrets are revealed and conflicts enumerated in this fascinating glimpse behind the scenes at comics' "Golden Age." Plus! A "Shop Talk" with E.C. great Jack Davis! And another pre-war *Spirit* in glorious original color, *Mr. Mystic*, and a new Eisner cover.

Back issues still available!



Steve Canyon No. 9

Milton Caniff's *STEVE CANYON* No.9, in its new squarebound format with expanded pages will be shipping in late February.

This issue features the introduction of Doe Redwood, hotshot woman pilot, who joins Steve and the Dragonflies in China. After Doe and Steve clash over her flying with the Dragonflies, they get together on a dangerous undercover assignment which carries them into the clutches of the notorious blackmailer, The Pastfinder.

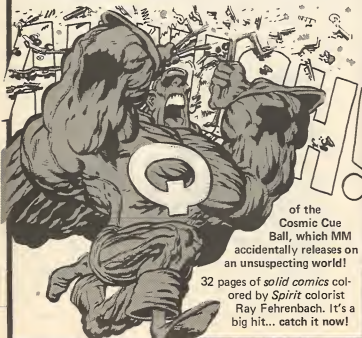
Also in this edition is the long-awaited article on early Caniff mentor Billy Ireland. If his name fails to light a bulb it's only because he chose to keep his tremendous talent a regional secret. Steve

Canyon is now a fat 72 pages of classic reprints on a bi-monthly basis! Don't miss an issue. You can catch up if necessary with back issues from your favorite dealer or direct from Kitchen Sink Press.



MEGATON MAN

In No.2 of Donald Simpson's *Megaton Man*, our favorite atomic pile teams up with the fightin', flyin' and funny Megatropolis Quartet! This landmark episode hits newsstands on Feb. 9. Thrill to Megaton Man's new uniform! Chill to the menace of long-thought-dead Red Meatball! Wonder at the terrible power



of the Cosmic Cue Ball, which MM accidentally releases on an unsuspecting world!

32 pages of solid comics colored by *Spirit* colorist Ray Fehrenbach. It's a big hit... catch it now!

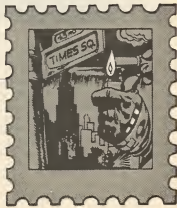
Spirit No. 8

Will Eisner's *SPIRIT* color comic No.8 will be in shops on Feb. 9th. Now a thick 44 pages printing five complete classic stories from the 1940s (in chronological order for the first time). \$2.95 — a bargain, particularly when considering the high price of original *Spirit* sections if they can be found!

In this issue we feature "Cargo Octopus" (formerly "Postage Stamp"), the very first appearance of The Spirit's arch-enemy, the faceless Octopus. Also featured are Dulcet Tone, Silk Satin and Skinny Bones. The Spirit and The Octopus have their respective gloved hands full in this legendary tale.

The second story, "Manitou," revolves around an Indian legend and hidden treasure. Sol Grundy, a thieving real estate agent, has more than hotel designs in mind when he finds out about the loot. A strange and terrible fate awaits him. Other stories are: "Spirit of Enterprise," "Who Killed Cox Robin," and "The Inner Voice."

This action-packed series has received the highest praise. If you have not yet discovered Will Eisner or The Spirit, do yourself a favor and check out an issue! Back issues still available from dealers or KSP.



LOCAL HEROES:

an interview with
ARTHUR ADAMS
and
MIKE MIGNOLA

This is an interview I've been wanting to do for a long time. Arthur Adams and Mike Mignola are, to coin a phrase, two local California boys who have made good. I first met them when I moved to the Bay Area about three years ago at a time when they were both young artists struggling to break into the business. Though still enviably young, their time has finally come: 1985 will mark Marvel's release of Mike's ROCKET RACCOON mini-series premiering in February and Arthur's six-issue LONGSHOT series beginning in June.

Ironically, this interview took place not in California, but in New York City during Creation's '84 Thanksgiving convention, which Arthur and Mike attended as the out-of-town guest celebrities! And I'm doubly thrilled: first of all, to spotlight my friends this issue, and secondly, to see them get their long-deserved due.

The following interview was transcribed by Eric Yarber, copy-edited by Mike and Arthur, with final edits by yours truly. I'd like to thank the boys for all their help with this and, in particular, for their beautiful cover illustration this issue.

Special thanks, also, to Gary Peterson, without whose generous assistance this interview could not have taken place.

-- Diana Schutz

DIANA: Let's start with how Art got into comics.

ARTHUR: And Mike too, but Art first! Okay, well I just sent some Xeroxes to Marvel and they sat in Al Milgrom's office for a long time--

MIKE: Oh gawd, it's going to be day by day!

ARTHUR: No, it's not. And then when Al was leaving and Carl Potts was coming in, they were going through the Xeroxes and found mine and Al thought I'd be okay, so he gave them to Carl and Carl sent me some sample stuff. Ann Nocenti liked the samples I sent back and she was going to be starting the LONGSHOT series, so that was it. Louise [Jones] called and said, "Hey, want to draw?" and I said "Yeah!"

DIANA: So it was pretty simple for you, in other words. You just sent in Xeroxes and that was it?

ARTHUR: Yeah.



Not-so-local heroes: aliens Longshot and Rocket Raccoon, by Arthur Adams and Mike Mignola, respectively.

(C) Marvel Comics Group

DIANA: What about Mike? You had to move to New York.

MIKE: I went through the long drawn out version, not the "quick step to success!" I had been doing some fan stuff for THE CDMIC READER and I sent samples back to Marvel which Al Milgrom lost...understandable! Marvel contacted me finally about doing some inking and I did five pages of a DEFENDERS job, which were absolutely terrible. I mean, some of the worst stuff ever.

DIANA: You were sick at the time, weren't you?

MIKE: Yeah, but that's kind of a cop-out. I didn't know what I was doing. I was on pain pills at the time... [laughter] Stoned out of my mind, inking Don Perlin! So about the time I mailed that job in I'd made plans to move to New York, and I called Al Milgrom to ask how he liked the job, and he said, "Well, um, um, we're not too impressed." But I went anyway, and I went through about two months without work, juggling from one place to live to another. Finally, I started picking up some inking work. I did some quickie MICRONAUTS stuff, I did some MARVEL UNIVERSE drawings, and then I picked up on the MASTER OF KUNG FU stuff. So I finished off that series.

DIANA: Just as it was getting cancelled?

MIKE: Yeah. So I had three issues running to do. I kind of learned a little as I went along. I definitely got better. It was amazingly tight deadline stuff, so it was gruelling. I moved in right near Marvel to finish the job. Then I moved back to California with the understanding that I'd be inking DAREDEVIL. So I did an issue of that, then they changed their minds. I did an issue of POWER MAN, then I did an issue of KA-ZAR. I was supposed to be the "regular" inker on all these different books, but things really got scattered. It was one job to the next--no connection going on. I was really

frustrated with the inking career. The work wasn't very good. So, in '83, Al Milgrom finally asked me at the San Diego Convention about doing a story for MARVEL FANFARE. I said, "Gawd, I've got nothing to lose." Pacific had also asked me to draw a job. So, I did the FANFARE Sub-Mariner story, then I did the VISION/SCARLET WITCH story, which hasn't seen print. Then the ROCKET RACCOON series came up. The first time Bill [Mantlo] called me, it was about the Sub-Mariner story, and we talked and he said, "I've got this other book that I've been trying to do for a long time: raccoons in space. A funny animal along the Flash Gordon line." I said, "Gee, that'd be kind of fun." We talked about doing it as real animals, as opposed to funny animals, and that sounded great. So that shuffled back and forth for a long time. After two issues of the VISION/SCARLET WITCH, we went ahead with ROCKET RACCOON.

OIANA: Tell me briefly about both LONGSHOT and ROCKET RACCOON.



ARTHUR ADAMS and MIKE MIGNOLA

Photo courtesy Bob Schreck

ARTHUR: Oh boy. You go first this time.

MIKE: Where was I?

OIANA: Raccoons in space.

MIKE: Yeah. Rocket Raccoon first appeared in MARVEL PREVIEW, as the back-up to a "Star-Lord" feature. The character was created by Bill Mantlo and Keith Giffen. I've seen the story and Rocket Raccoon only appears really briefly, but even back then Bill evidently had plans for this whole Rocket Raccoon world. He resurfaced in THE INCREDIBLE HULK a couple of years back--that issue of THE HULK appears in the *Supergirl* movie, bizarrely enough. So what I was working from were Keith Giffen's character sketches and Sal [Buscema]'s work on THE HULK, neither of which I was thrilled with. I really had my own ideas. I did some sample pages and I had a real different look in mind. I was given complete freedom to redesign anything I wanted. Plus, the bulk of the world hadn't appeared yet. I had character sketches for maybe five or six characters. Everything else was completely up to me.

Basically, the series is set on a world that's half technological wasteland--all factory--and half forest. The forest side is basically a mental institution for 20th generation lunatics.

OIANA: Humans.

MIKE: Humans! The animals have been genetically altered so that they're intelligent, and they look after the humans. On the other half of the world, robots build machines and equipment, and then they work on their own secret project. The conflict comes in with two toy manufacturers--animals: one's a lizard, one's a mole. They're having a war to see who can monopolize this toy industry, because toys keep the humans pacified. Rocket Raccoon is kind of the sheriff of the whole place.

OIANA: His job is to keep the humans pacified and therefore avoid this toy war?

MIKE: That's right. His concern is for the humans.

OIANA: What about LONGSHOT?

ARTHUR: Well, LONGSHOT is Ann Nocenti's idea. He's basically a character who was a slave on his home planet, an extra-dimensional planet, where he was a gladiator type of the lowest class. There are supposedly three classes of aliens on this planet. Longshot's the lowest and the second is a race of what we would consider to be demons. The upper class are just gelatinous spineless guys in big robotic costumes, with spider chairs to carry around their nasty weight...

MIKE: Pompous bulk.

ARTHUR: Yeah. Well, apparently Longshot got into some trouble when he was on his planet and got his mind erased. He escapes to earth somehow, through this strange portal. He can use the portal because he belongs to a cult that is sort of similar to Jedi Knights in that they're trained to make forces flow their own way. Longshot controls luck. He is the hero type, our just-wonderful-guy hero on earth with no memory of what he ever has been. That's the concept of the whole thing. So he's running around remembering things and some of these other aliens have come to earth and are chasing him, and he doesn't know why. That's the gist of the deal.

OIANA: Unlike Mike's situation, Longshot was an entirely new creation and not taken from a previous book. Did you have the freedom to design the character and costume and stuff like that?

ARTHUR: Yeah, the way everything looks is all mine. I tried getting some Giger stuff into it, but that didn't seem to work. It's all basically mine.

OIANA: Will we see Gummy in LONGSHOT? [Laughter]

MIKE: Yes.

ARTHUR: No.

OIANA: Admit it, admit it!

ARTHUR: There's a guy with a lopsided head in there. He could be Gummy, I'm not saying. [Laughter]

OIANA: Both books are kind of offbeat. Is that what you both prefer to do? If you had your choice of any character or any genre, what would you be working on?

MIKE: I'm much more comfortable doing a book that has no ties to the Marvel universe. ROCKET RACCOON was a lot of fun because I made up everything. I didn't have to worry about getting the action flowing and then having to draw New York street scenes behind it. I prefer doing a book like that. There's a project I'm looking forward to doing one of these days, an Epic comic I hope, that will be a book that takes place in the future, rather than on another planet. It would be based on a lot of medieval stuff, but modified, and strictly what I want to draw.

ARTHUR: The stuff I like best, what I just love to do, is the big heroic fantasy kind of thing where the hero always comes through no matter what...with loud music at the end and the hero rocketing toward sudden death and coming out okay! *Raiders of the Lost Ark* type stuff.

MIKE: Regular Marvel universe stuff?

ARTHUR: Sure. It doesn't matter what it is--I'm happy.

DIANA: You're just an all-American boy.

ARTHUR: Yeah. [Laughter]

DIANA: Mike, on the other hand, has a slightly sadistic, rather twisted bent.

MIKE: Well, I'm not really into superhero comics at all. My artistic influences aren't the people who did superheroes. Especially now, it's really kind of pulling teeth for me to do that type of stuff. The characters I tend to do, even in the Marvel universe, are the stranger ones.

DIANA: Does that go hand-in-hand with your love of spending time in cemeteries?

MIKE: I wondered how you'd sneak that in there! Yeah. The cemetery you're referring to...it's Barry Smith land. Lots of terrific trees with statues peeking over the tops of them. Tombs... I don't know what to say about that stuff.

DIANA: Both of you are based in California, and you, Mike, spent a year in New York then went back west--

MIKE: Five months.

ARTHUR: Seemed like a year!

DIANA: How does working in California affect your ongoing relationship with Marvel, given that Marvel is based in New York? Do you have any problems with that?

ARTHUR: I don't have any problems with that. That's how I started: without them ever having met me. Federal Express makes it quick and easy.

MIKE: It's definitely easier now, especially because of the way conventions are set up in the Bay Area. They almost always have an editor coming out. I like the way I started out, by moving to New York City for a while, because I got to know so many of the people --like Al Milgrom, who's been a terrific help. It's definitely easier once you get to know some of the people.

DIANA: If you were in New York pounding on Marvel's door, would more things be coming your way? Or is that not so much the case anymore?

MIKE: It would probably be too tempting, because when I'm in New York, for example, my name will come up for jobs and an editor might say, "Well no, he's doing something else." In New York I'd hear all this stuff and I'd probably get terribly confused. I've got more work now than I can possibly do.

DIANA: Though you both have established series coming out in '85, you're still relative newcomers to the field. Are there any special problems associated with that?

ARTHUR: I guess we're still the new kids, but we've been around almost two years. The pros know us, it's just the fans who haven't really seen anything yet.

MIKE: I have a hard time thinking of myself as a professional. It's easier the more times you come back to New York and you hang out with the other



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pros. Living in California, I don't hang around with that many professionals. The nearest ones are of course in San Francisco, and I don't have that much contact with them, really. I'm used to associating with people who have nothing to do with comics. So it's always kind of weird for me.

DIANA: Going back to this, you've said you've both been in the business for a couple of years, but fans haven't seen your work yet.

MIKE: Thank God!

DIANA: Well, you've both had cover jobs, and Mike, you had that Sub-Mariner story in *MARVEL FANFARE* plus your inking jobs. In a very real sense, though, you are both still newcomers. And yet all of a sudden, without either *ROCKET RACCOON* or *LONGSHOT* having hit the stands yet, both of you are finding yourselves involved with major Marvel characters. Arthur, you've got *NEW MUTANTS* and *X-MEN* annuals for '85. Mike, originally you were going to do *THE HULK*, and I guess you've done a few issues of that. Now you're changing over to *ALPHA FLIGHT*. Do either of you feel intimidated?

ARTHUR: Well, I'm an all-American boy, so no problem! We know the people we're working with and they're friends now. It's weird talking about it after being fans for so long, but they are friends now and we spend a lot of time talking. I'm still a little intimidated looking at the John Byrne *X-MEN* and all, but I'm looking forward to doing the annuals.

TO LIKE SOME PROOF #1? I DON'T MIND DYING BEFORE I PLACE JIMMY UNDER ARREST.



OH, IT'S SO PROOF YOU WANT TO MISS IT?



(C) Marvel Comics Group



Photo courtesy Rob Schreck

All-American boy ARTHUR ADAMS

MIKE: In my case, I don't consider myself a superhero artist. I was conned into THE HULK. "It's not really a superhero. The situation there is he's on different worlds. You won't have to draw New York City. It'll be a fantasy book with a big green monster." I said okay, little knowing...well, I guess I was warned that the Hulk would have to come back to earth pretty soon. Now, with ALPHA FLIGHT coming up... That was really bizarre. The night Bill Mantlo called me about that, we talked for awhile and I said, "Okay." I'd read the first couple of issues of ALPHA FLIGHT. Nothing against ALPHA FLIGHT in particular, but I usually don't read superhero comics--or most. Arthur was staying in the same building at the time, and I asked him about ALPHA FLIGHT and he said it would be terrific to do. So I thought about it some more, then decided I didn't want to do it after all. So I called Bill Mantlo the next morning and told him I didn't want to do it, and he said, "Don't tell me that!" So he finally talked me into it. By this time, the editor didn't know what I was going to do! So this trip [to New York] Bill and I sat down with John Byrne and talked about the direction for the book, and it's not going to be a regular superhero comic. It can't be. My style is not a regular superhero style. To say the least.

ARTHUR: Last night he decided he wanted to get all the super-villains together and do one big job with a bunch of old Marvel villains versus Alpha Flight!

MIKE: That's scary. Here I am, Mr. Non-Superhero, and I'm getting these weird ideas from Jack Kirby AVENGER. "Legion of Super-Villains," you know? Oh gawd! I was raised on comics, of course. I wasn't into it as much as some people. Sure, I'd like to do some of that stuff. I've never drawn real superheroes, so it'll be fun to do some of that. But the bulk of what I want to do is weird kinds of things.

DIANA: What about drawing that many characters? In both cases we're talking team books: ALPHA FLIGHT,

NEW MUTANTS, X-MEN.

ARTHUR: I think I'd get bored with a single character book. I think I prefer the group books. Even with LONGSHOT, which offhand seems to be a single character book, there got to be a pretty big supporting cast as it went along, so there were plenty of other characters I could grab hold of and have fun with.

DIANA: What about you, Mike? You'll be doing that many characters on a monthly basis.

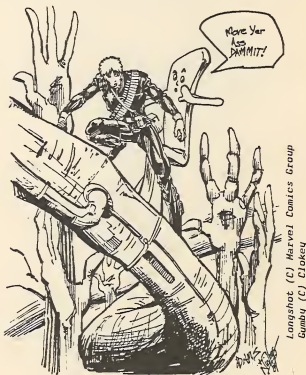
MIKE: I haven't thought about it too much, seriously.

DIANA: You're trying not to think about it!

MIKE: Yeah. Again, that's a thing with ALPHA FLIGHT now. We want to make it a superhero team book, whereas John [Byrne]'s has been a lot of "this week we'll do this character, this week we'll do that character," which is an approach I would actually prefer. But it's supposed to be a superhero team book, like SECRET WARS: every character every panel. I don't know how I feel about it. I can't imagine myself doing it, until I guess I actually get around to doing it. I look at comics, THE HULK, ALPHA FLIGHT especially, as a learning experience. I want to do my own projects eventually. This'll be a hell of a learning experience for me. I might go nuts. But I have no choice. I told them I'd do it. It'll be fun.

DIANA: So both of you were weaned on comics. Are your influences primarily within the field?

ARTHUR: Mine, I guess, are pretty much. Jack Kirby, Mike Golden, Walt Simonson--people like that. My other comic book influences were people getting out of comics: Windsor-Smith, Wrightson, and Kaluta. Following their other stuff led to other things. As I've been in comics I've learned more and seen things that people have insisted I see. All of that's been influencing me. For the LONGSHOT Graphic Novel that I'm supposed to be doing later, I found an Alphonse



Longshot (C) Marvel Comics Group
Gumby (C) Clokey

A sketch by Gumby-fan Arthur Adams, inked by another local artist, Art Nichols.

Mucha book. That was terrific and I decided that that's how I'm going to do the graphic novel. I don't know if that's how I'll actually do it...!

MIKE: I'll believe that when I see it.

ARTHUR: Yeah, but that was a big influence. For the last couple of issues of LONGSHOT, I've been looking at Mucha all the time, just being amazed by his stuff.

DIANA: Did you have any formal art training?

ARTHUR: Nah--just sitting around the house, watching TV and drawing.

DIANA: Mike, what about your influences? You mentioned that the people that impressed you were basically not superhero artists.

MIKE: Well, in high school I was into comics. Then I went to junior college where I was basically out of comics entirely. It was a weird two years where every other week I was trying a different style. I was really into a lot of fantasy illustration and children's book illustration. Then art school got weird, too. But right before art school I found the Berni Wrightson book, *A Look Back*, and that's what made me decide I wanted to be an inker. I started by copying that book. My big influences are...actually, not so much Berni anymore. For a while I was almost a cripple, I was so dependent on Wrightson's stuff. Now it's so many people. I'm still a huge Frazetta fan. Everything I know about spotting blacks, I'd say, is from Frazetta. Working back from there, N.C. Wyeth was a big influence. Most of the children's book illustrators from that time period: Reckham, William Heath Robinson. I'm trying to bring in as much stuff from that into comics, the way Barry Smith does when he does that pre-Raphaelite look, which I love. Of course, there are still people like Walt Simonson and Bill Sienkiewicz who are huge influences. I'd say right now that Walt is one of my biggest influences in comics. It'll probably never surface, but his THOR is one of the very few books that I pick up every month and really look at and get excited about. There are very few artists



Photo courtesy Bob Schrenk

A contemplative MIKE MIGNOLA--or did he really sleep through the interview???

in comics today that I get that excited about. Craig Russell's another one.

DIANA: It's maybe not a fair question to ask you right now, but are comics it for both of you? You've made it now, you've attained this plateau, do you want to stay in comics?

ARTHUR: I'd like to stay in comics, but I don't think I've attained any plateau. I like comics and all, but--

DIANA: What else would you like to do?

ARTHUR: When I was in high school I actually considered being a comedian. Then I realized I wasn't too funny! [Laughter] I had no jokes! I'd always drawn all my life, so I went ahead and... I had some old Mike Golden MICRONAUTS that just blew me away, so I said, "I'll do this." I guess there's not too much else I could do.

DIANA: But are there other things that you'd want to do that are related to the comics field?

ARTHUR: Anything that has to do with art, I'm pretty happy with. I wanted to be an actor for a long time, too. Sometimes I still think about that. Not too much.

MIKE: I never thought I'd want to stay in comics. My big influences, again, were the whole Studio crowd [Wrightson, Windsor-Smith, Jones, Kaluta]. They did comics, then they went off and did prints and portfolios. Sure, I want to do that, but part of me really likes doing comics. No one's more surprised about it than me. So I'd like to stay in comics. There's stuff I've talked to Archie Goodwin about for Epic. There's a Nathaniel Hawthorne short story I want to adapt for EPIC ILLUSTRATED, and I might do it within the next five years. I can see myself staying in comics to a certain extent. But I'd like to do a lot more painting, a lot more portfolios. Once I start getting into something like ALPHA FLIGHT, I realize, "Gawd, I'm not going to have time to do



Rocket Raccoon (C) Marvel Comics Group

One of Mignola's convention sketches.

any painting." But there's a lot of illustration work I want to do, a lot of color work. I can't see it coming out in my comics.

ARTHUR: I guess working in comic books is sort of addictive, too, because it's just so much fun telling those bigger-than-life stories.

MIKE: Yeah. I've been basically a one-picture person for so long that I used to think, "Well, maybe if I do the inking work they'll let me do a cover every once in a while." Now, covers aren't as fun as actually telling the story. So I'd like to stay in the storytelling thing.

DIANA: The focus, now, it seems, is more and more on writer/artists, as opposed to dividing the labor. Mike, you've talked about adapting a Hawthorne story. Are either of you interested in writing your own stuff?

ARTHUR: I want to write my own stuff real bad, but there are a lot of things I'm committed to right now—which I'm thoroughly happy to be doing, since I do get input. What I'm doing is good, but yeah, I'd like to write my own stuff. There are a lot of things I'd like to write.

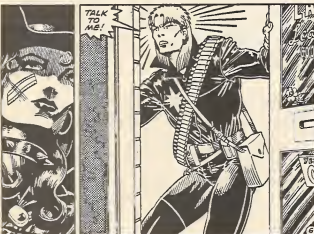
MIKE: No.

DIANA: No, not at all?

MIKE: I can't. Adapting something is about the closest I can see right now. Maybe someday. The relationship I have with Bill Mantlo is that we talk about stuff and I tell him what I want to draw. I don't have whole stories, but I've got images in mind. To a large extent that's how Bill works, too. He's got images in mind. I tell him my images, he tells me his, and then he works them into a plot. I guess it's conceivable that I could work up some kind of plot and maybe someday do an actual script for something, but right now I can't see it.

ARTHUR: I did write a short story for BIZARRE ADVENTURES—which will hopefully never see print. That was my first Marvel job. Just before I turned twenty.

DIANA: It hasn't been that long since you were fans and not pros. I know you're both still fans, but in terms of the way people usually cast that dividing line between fans and pros, it hasn't been that long since you were fans. How does it feel now to have your own fans, to have people come up to you at conventions asking for sketches and talking to you about your work, being interviewed, and all that?



Longshot attempts conversation with a storefront mannequin.

(C) Marvel Comics Group

ARTHUR: This is our first interview and that's strange. I don't know if it sounds weird but I really don't care too much about the fans. I'm just doing this because this is what I want to do. I want the fans to enjoy the book, of course, and I want them to be involved in it, but I want them to have absolutely no control and I wish more of them understood that. I want them to be along for the ride, but not driving.

MIKE: I think it's neat. It always surprises me if someone comes up and says positive things. It'll be really weird when ROCKET RACCOON comes out—or it could be really frightening, I don't know. Again, like I said, it's really strange when people come up and want a sketch. You're a bit afraid? "See, do you really want this? You're going to really hate this, aren't you?" You get in a position where they really want these things and they really like this stuff, and you always think that they're just being nice. I guess somewhere along the line you've got to start realizing that they do like what you do and they get excited about it. I think it's, um, great. I really love talking to them and I especially love seeing people who want to get into the business that are good, or have the potential for being good. I'm looking forward to seeing someone who comes along at a convention and whom I'm able to help, and see them get into the business. I showed my girlfriend Linda's stuff around, and there's talk of Louise Jones writing her a story—even Bill Mantlo offered to write her a story. And that would be real exciting to me. Since I live right near an art school, I get people coming over from the school, and I do a guest speaker stint at the school occasionally. So I like it. I'd never become a teacher, but I like helping people who are genuinely interested.



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Rocket and Wal Rus

Join us next issue for an interview with the creators of *Comico's NEXT MAN* series, writer Roger McKenzie and artist Vince Argondezzi.

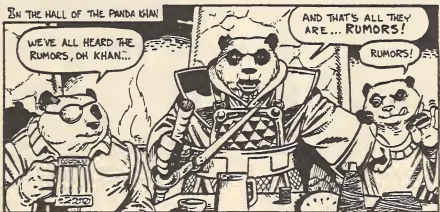
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ON SALE NOW!

SEASON'S SCREENINGS

The Christmas season is over yet there are still a couple of presents from Hollywood under the tree. And if you've been a good boy or girl, and you have five bucks, they are yours for the unwrapping. I'm referring of course to DUNE and 2010: OODYSSEY TWO, the long awaited pair of science fiction epics now vying for your hard-earned dollars. Both films had very similar births. Both are based on novels written by very popular authors in the genre and both were supplied with enormous budgets and promotional campaigns. Furthermore, both films had very respected directors at the helm and state-of-the-art special effects companies at beck and call. This, however, is where the similarities end.

I must admit, I had a great deal of trouble making it through the prose version of Arthur C. Clarke's sequel and, by the time I finished reading the book, I felt like I had been ripped off. It seems that Clarke was writing with the SF fan too heavily in mind. I mean, did his inclusion of STAR TREK and STAR WARS references do anything to enhance his story of planetary evolution, or was it used simply to ingratiate himself with his audience? Quite honestly, I thought it a bit of a waste to portray David Bowman as a "new-and-improved" consciousness floating about the cosmos with his trusty sidekick HAL. Is that the future we have to look forward to: our own individual television shows, a beautician's license, and tampering with government checks? Boy! Real important stuff. The resolve of the book was far less offending than the film's, yet for my tastes neither had much of a punch.

On the other hand, DUNE was not a sequel and author Frank Herbert didn't have anyone helping in the creation of the original idea, whispering sweet enigmatic visual impressions in his ear that even he didn't understand. Unlike Clarke, Herbert worked from scratch and came up with this biblical SF fantasy all on his own. Clarke had a short story which was greatly expanded upon by Stanley Kubrick who used it as a vehicle to express what he saw in his mind. Kubrick knew where he was going with 2001 and he got there. No sequel should have been written. But if Clarke had to do it, perhaps he should have focused more on the higher consciousness holding the cards, rather than on all the little ants scrambling in the dirt waiting to see what was going to happen. A story based around the "overseers" would have been more interesting to read and probably more difficult to write, but definitely less salable to the masses. Old Clarke have this in mind at the time?

Now, on to these stories as films. As a film, 2010 succeeded—at the box office at least. It's not exactly a shining example of filmmaking, but it told its story clearly and it entertained. Unlike its predecessor, however, it did not make you think. All of the questions the viewer left with at the end of 2001 were hardly even addressed, let alone explained.

DUNE, as a film, unfortunately did not succeed. The story details and character development were left in two and a half hours of extra footage sprawled all over the cutting room floor. Director David Lynch did, however, do a commendable job with this compelling story in the sense that he was able to capture its splendor and epic qualities on film. The film looked important and I'm sure that if the total five hours were screened all at once, the story would be greatly enhanced and possibly the characters would seem more alive. But because of time and the fear of

making a serialized STAR WARS storytelling attempt, the DUNE epic comes across as weak and pale compared to the novel. David Lynch repeats certain catch phrases over and over to make sure he gets the basic idea across to the slim of mind in the audience, but in so doing he frays the patience of the rest of the crowd. His dream sequences are magnificent, yet here again, the constant repetition tends to diminish their impact on the viewer. And by the time you get to the end of the film, readying yourself for the grand finale, it's over. So Paul can break linoleum with a high C note. Big deal!

2010 had a cast that would and should thrill any audience. Well, they read their lines and, aside from one or two moments, that's about all they did. Both John Lithgow and Roy Scheider are capable of delivering superb performances, yet all we got was Cheez Wiz! For my money, Bob Balaban stole the show. His portrayal of Dr. Chandra, HAL's creator, was a pure delight. The Russian astronaut played by Elya Baskin was enjoyable. But the other Russians were left out of the picture entirely. They were made out to be bumbling and unfriendly clods who brought the political worries of home out into space with them. This was very shallow storytelling in my eyes and really took away from the enjoyment of the film. In fact, the whole overlaying of the relationship between the U.S. and Russia was just plain trite. Keeping that aspect low key was the one thing Clarke did well in the book. Highlighting it in the film only served to trivialize the story even more. The grand finale of 2010 winds up with a gooey, sugar-and-spice monologue that leaves a very unsettling after-taste on one's palate. This "happy" ending is shadowed by the one remaining question: what happens when the one planet decreed untouchable to humans grows up and starts to spread its wings? The suggestion of planetary war, or at least some kind of competition over the solar system, seems far less important than the myriad of cosmic questions left swirling in your brain by 2010's predecessor.

DUNE also had a cast that promised superb performances and lots of fun. The performances were good, but there wasn't enough of each character on the screen for the viewer to get to know or identify with any of them. Linda Hunt, a very talented actress, was totally wasted in this project. The same goes for Max Von Sydow: one blink of an eye and he was history.

I had a lot of problems with both films, for different reasons. 2010 didn't have much going for it and the filmmakers accentuated the negative points of Clarke's story and went for the money. DUNE had too much going for it and the filmmakers tried, but failed, to condense and capsulize the story to fit into a little over two hours. However, I would much rather sit through two and some odd hours of an honest attempt at making people feel a story than be treated like cattle through a turnstile and patronized for my money.

My final verdict: 2010 should never have been made and DUNE should have been shown in its original five hour length. I commend director David Lynch for giving it the old college try and hang my head in shame for the obvious ploy for money made by the creators of 2010.

One small note with regard to my last column. I had reported that a new film by special effects wizard

Ray Harryhausen was going into production. Well, that information--printed in the September '84 issue of CINEFANTASTIQUE--was incorrect. I recently received a letter from Mr. Harryhausen informing me that indeed his longtime friend and producer, Mr. Charles Schneer, is involved in a project with I.L.M., however Mr. Harryhausen is not. In the meantime, GODZILLA has opened to the Japanese public and hopefully will be stomping its way to the U.S. by this summer!

Take good care of yourselves and if you want a good laugh, go see Michael Douglas' STARMAN with Karen Allen and Jeff Bridges. It's pretty neat, and although it's admittedly fluff, it's well done fluff and worth five bucks for a night out.

JUST TRYING TO BE,

Schreck



BOB SCHRECK and Japanese friend

Photo courtesy G. Peachtree

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MR. X #2

His name is Mr. X. He is odd in appearance: bald, he is given to wearing a black tie, a white shirt, and a trenchcoat when visiting. His eyes are hidden by dark glasses. He has an omnivorous appetite for junk food like pizza and hot dogs. Thanks to a serum of his own making, he has not slept for 70 days. He is the architect of Radiant City and knows its secrets.

In the second issue of Vortex Publications' MR. X, the Hernandez brothers again display their storytelling talents. With the comic book marketplace so overcrowded with adolescent superhero material devoid of originality, style, or personal vision, every appearance of the Hernandez brothers' work is an event. This and their other comic, LOVE AND ROCKETS, are comics to give to friends who are not familiar with the medium.

What makes MR. X so special? Sharp dialogue, idiosyncratic characters of some complexity, and an intriguing setting are the foremost pleasures of this story. The Hernandez brothers handle the melodramatic situations with wit and economy. Their art is of a similar high quality: figures have a weight and solidity rare in comics. The style is simple, yet evocative of life beyond the panels of the comic page.

Though not quite as good as LOVE AND ROCKETS, MR. X is superior to most of the material in the marketplace. Here's hoping for a long run.

-- JOE MAGEE

FANTASTIC FOUR #276 and ACTION COMICS #565

I mentioned some bad things about Johnny Storm last issue, but figured it might be due to the poor fellow's embarrassment at having to be seen in THE SECRET WARS, so I decided to drop by his home and see how he was doing there.

Poor Johnny. I knew him when he was in high school, you know. Who would have thought that the silly jerk would end up making a play for his best friend's girlfriend? You've got to believe me, folks, I knew these people when they were all a lot nicer, honestly. I wonder if he calls Alicia a "chippie" when they're alone together.

I guess I should talk about how much personality the She-Hulk just oozes, but I'm only on the third paragraph of this review and already I'm starting to depress myself. I'll simply say that the old Fantastic Four were a bunch of jolly misfits who used to hop all over the world fighting one amusing menace after another. This crowd spends most of its time sleeping around and hiding from people, with a fight scene tossed in now and then without so much as a single Ben Grimm wisecrack to lighten things up.

Y'know, a strip doesn't have to be changed so drastically simply because it's been around for a while. The old Fantastic Four were strong enough characters that they didn't have to be muted into their current incarnation. Look at how Superman has managed to get along, for example.

ACTION #565 has a lead story by Mort Todd entitled "The Wizard City Warrior." It's actually a sequel to a decades-old SUPERBOY story that was reprinted a while back. Though the story harks to this earlier tale, the continuity is far from confining, and it's actually reassuring to know that the old stories still count for something in the current series.

As a story itself, the tale carries all the classic SUPERMAN traits. Lana Lang plays Lois, but Jimmy Olsen shows up to get in trouble, and the Man of Steel finds himself once again the only hero on earth who can stop a Kryptonian menace. It could have worked with only minor modifications in an issue of ACTION thirty years ago, and that is by no means an insult. There's an appeal to Superman that really doesn't need to be tampered with, and this story carries it forward. It's why you buy the comic book, isn't it?

THE P.I.'s #1

Well, they're not Little Lulu and Uncle Scrooge, I think. Both Ms. Tree and Mike Mauser are offshoots of the hard-boiled school of detectives, so it isn't impossible to see them teaming up. Actually, it helps both characters, since Tree isn't quite as grim as usual, while Mauser has a verbal sparring partner more along his level. Max Collins' script is generally interesting (I have problems with characters who can kill someone with about as much emotion as I spend buying a subway ticket, but I guess Mickey Spillane started it) and the combination of Joe Staton on pencils and Terry Beatty on inks is rather good. The ending of this issue falls midway between a life-or-death cliffhanger and a subtle break, but it certainly made me wonder what was going to happen in the next issue. I understand that this is selling like crazy, so you don't need me to push it at you.

FLAMING CARROT #3

Before I start this review, do me a favor. Try to imagine Little Lulu meeting Uncle Scrooge. Got it? Now, what would they say? What would they do?

Forget it. I've been trying to imagine a Lulu-Scrooge crossover for about a week and a half now, and I can't do it, at least not in the way that John Stanley and Carl Barks handled those characters. No, it's not drawing style or copyright problems or differences in species that would prevent such an encoun-



(C) Bob Burden

Bob Burden's FLAMING CARROT

ter. It's something much more intangible. They don't *talk* the same way. They *move* at a different speed. The logic systems behind the worlds they come from are completely incompatible. As the Flash of Earth-Two would say, "Their molecules vibrate differently."

Molecules have nothing to do with it, actually. The differences between Stanley's work and Barks' come from the individual styles and voices that those men brought to their work. Even though both men were supposedly writing for the same audience, they approached their readers in drastically different ways.

It's something to think about. These days, superheroes from different books and different companies can fall around each other and mix as well as two different flavors of Kool-Aid. It's getting harder and harder to find something that comes from an entirely different direction.

Okay, now I'll start the review.

FLAMING CARROT is a bimonthly bit of individual expression from Mr. Bob Burden, a man who luckily seems to have learned very little from reading comic books. The issue at hand concerns the Artless Dodger, a slippery devil who keeps his hideout in Flaming Carrot's spare bathroom. Don't ask me to summarize the story beyond that. (Believe me, if I could tell you, you wouldn't want to know.) Suffice to say that it leaps along at an erratic rate, developing in unexpected and possibly impossible directions.

Sometimes the lunatic pace gets a bit strained. Every now and then a crazy speech seems to fizz like a wet firecracker instead of pasting the reader in the snoot like the more successful sallies. The amount of hits outnumber misses by at least three to one, however, and some readers may have a 100% explosion rate.

The book is definitely worth looking into, if only for the infrequent utterances of the title character. Even such simple statements as "Gosh!" or "You gonna get it!" seem hilarious when coming from Flaming Carrot's...*mouth*. I guess you'd call it. Of course, the humor comes from the surroundings, the (like I said) *style* that Burden brings to his stories, a style that is honestly like no other

currently to be seen. It's certainly rare to see a *really* different world in a comic book, and for it to be laughing-out-loud funny is almost too much to ask for. Fortunately, it's very easy to ask for FLAMING CARROT, so let's all get together and make this one a hit, okay?

HEARTBREAK COMICS

Another winner. David Boswell first came to my attention in 1980, when I picked up a copy of REID FLEMING, WORLD'S TOUGHEST MILKMAN. The book was a series of mostly one-page situations featuring the incredibly strong, incredibly nasty Mr. Fleming, and was probably the single funniest comic to have emerged from this decade. How many other characters can you name that have wound up on a t-shirt on the basis of only one appearance? Fleming is indeed a legend.

Just in time to appear in 1984 comes Boswell's second book, HEARTBREAK COMICS. One hears the term "graphic novel" tossed around a lot, but I think this one may be a little closer to that term than most of the extended comic book issues that proclaim themselves as such. It's a 41-page complete-in-one-issue semi-sequel to FLEMING that deals with the unfortunate love life of "Great Slavic Lover" Laszlo. One of Laszlo's conquests turns out to be Lena, Reid Fleming's wife, but Laszlo himself is much too taken with the lovely Constance to keep the affair up. Fleming figures it had gone on far too long as it was, however.

The book is drawn in much more detail than FLEMING, and the milkman's mad rages are kept to a minimum. The main focus of this volume seems to be in painting a world of confused romance where people either love the wrong people, or are loved by the wrong people, or love the right people but aren't loved by them, or are generally better off getting into a better sort of business to begin with. It's an ambitious theme for a humor book, and Boswell seems to have decided that it's more important than being continually hilarious. The laughs are spread farther apart than in FLEMING, which may alienate some fans of the first book. There's more of the inspired logic that went into such gags as Fleming's love of "Ivan," however, an entrance scene on page 31



(C) David Boswell

Laszlo goes deep sea "fishing" at a masquerade.

being both funny and rather mind-twisting at the same time. Other scenes in this vein, like Laszlo's moonlight flight under the influence of love, are only funny in side details. The main point of such scenes seems to go beyond the simple one of merely making someone laugh. They're not taken completely seriously at any point, but there is still a sort of lyrical emotion coming from the ludicrous figures in the book.

It's really nice to see a book that has a sensibility like this behind it. While the plot veers and slides in all directions, the general philosophy of HEARTBREAK remains constant and is proven by the examples it sets within its pages. It's utterly without pretension, no great messages within it, but still has something to say. Okay, Mr. Dealer, wrap one up for me.

-- ERIC YARBER

STRANGE DAYS #1

The world needs variety. I don't know if there are any people out there who would admit that they'd like to see Sonny and Cher or Donny and Marie on television still, but I know for a fact that people want variety in comics. Alternative comics are testimony to that. HEAVY METAL had been the only alternative to the long underwear superhero market until EPIC ILLUSTRATED and later alternative comics like those from First and Eclipse. STRANGE DAYS gives us the variety of HEAVY METAL with the quality of an alternative publisher like Eclipse.

Produced by the creative team of Milligan, McCarthy, and Ewins, and published by Eclipse, STRANGE DAYS is a comic-size answer to HEAVY METAL and EPIC. The book is printed with a consistent high quality, which often is lacking in HEAVY METAL, and gets away from the Marvel crossover and superhero type stories that are usually the strong point of EPIC ILLUSTRATED.

The lead story in issue #1 looks like a HEAVY METAL story with its blend of the mechanical and the organic as shown by the mad-hatted oracle. At the same time, the story shows a resemblance to the British 2000 A.D. type of tale, as evidenced by the use of grotesque figures and insane characters. The English creators of STRANGE DAYS are no doubt influenced by both French and English comics, and the synthesis found in their work is refreshing. The "Paradox" story, my personal favorite, features an anti-hero type character whose superhero problems more than outweigh any of superheroing's advantages. My only problem with the story was the portrayal of a "typical" American: a fat, red-necked, Texan slob. America's a big country, guys--use a real character next time.

While I'm not looking for a new Donny and Marie show, I am pleased to find a \$1.50 alternative to the inconsistent quality of the more expensive HEAVY METAL. STRANGE DAYS is good. Variety and consistency aren't contradictory. They're what we all really need.

SISTERHOOD OF STEEL #1

In opening I would like to say that I consider myself neither a chauvinist nor a feminist. It is from this hopefully neutral stance that I view SISTERHOOD OF STEEL #1, a new EPIC comic from the creative team of Christy Marx and Mike Vosburg. I have always liked Vosburg's work, especially his women. He may be guilty, as are most comic book

artists, of drawing all women with D cups, but he has also always given his women a strong, muscular look which lends itself particularly well to SISTERHOOD OF STEEL. There is a shower scene which I first questioned on the basis of whether or not a comic needs gratuitous taa. But looking back on it, the dialogue was real--shower room talk is usually very revealing (some pun intended)--and the tensions and apprehensions of the scene are valid. Okay, a hard-working warrior is going to need to shower.

Now, here's where I have to be careful. I have some problems understanding why the Sisterhood has come to be and why it does what it does. The founder of the Sisterhood, Ataluma, was raped by the pirates that ravaged her town and was taken away as their slave. She couldn't stand the abuse so she plotted revenge, which included sleeping with both of the rival leaders and inciting the other enslaved women into rebellion. Okay, the revolution is a success, and the women hold their island off from a variety of would-be conquerors and mold themselves into the militaristic Sisterhood of Steel. Throwing off the yoke of sexual servitude and enslavement, the Sisterhood forms with the idea of becoming the world's greatest mercenary military machine. That's the part that throws me. One would think that when a nation overthrows an unjust oppressor, it would go to great lengths to avoid being like that oppressor. The Sisterhood, however, throws off an oppressive male militaristic society and replaces it with a more disciplined, new-and-improved female militaristic society. It's not that they're just defending themselves; they're actually trying to be the world's greatest mercenaries. Now, mercenaries in comics often have hidden noble purposes, which may surface later, but as it stands right now it appears to me that the Sisterhood of Steel took the only other possible turnoff on the same journey that the Amazons of Wonder Woman's Paradise Island went through. The Amazons abhorred the male ritual of war and instead sought a peaceful, enlightened existence, which included education in the liberal arts (not just military history) and athletics. Now the Amazons did indeed have to protect their island and they do maintain a protective force, but the society does not revolve around fighting for its livelihood.

I'm not looking for a sequel to WONDER WOMAN; I'm just looking for a society that shows some honorable reason for its uniqueness. Sure, protection is necessary; I don't begrudge anyone that. But why does a society of mercenaries evolve out of oppressed, abused women? As I said earlier, mercenaries often have wonderful intentions (at least in comics), and the Sisterhood of Steel may save the world, but the motivations for their becoming a mercenary society don't seem clear.

Origins and motivations aside, I enjoy the Boronwé character. Although her personality is revealed largely through her own dialogue (which is an annoying plot device in modern comics), she is an interesting character. There are, however, two characters that I object to because, from their first appearances, they are clichéd. Vandalis is introduced as a battle-proven warrior because she has a scar on her face and has a short temper. The other is Lanna who has lost an arm in battle and, therefore, is relegated to being a firm but understanding teacher. Ugh.

Maybe the dull, narrow-minded, militaristic Sisterhood is being set up for a fall or a renaissance. An overthrow or cultural revolution doesn't look likely though, and with the book's bimonthly schedule, it may be years before we know. Maybe I'm just not macho enough to enjoy the uninspired military life.

-- TOM HAUENET

COMIX WORLD

a. irons '78

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Though my column originated in WONDERWORLD in 1971, it became best known in the underground newspapers of the period, mainly in the Los Angeles *Free Press* and the Los Angeles *Staff*. One of the things I was doing at the time was a series of reports on underground comix and the artists who drew them. One of these was to be Greg Irons, but that interview didn't come out well. I called Greg at his place in Stinson Beach and told him what I was doing and he said to come on down. I drove down there from Berkeley that day, but when I got there, Irons was in a different mood than he had been on the phone. He was acting funny, and what it amounted to was he and Tom Veitch were intimidated by the idea that the Manson Family was going to get him. Well, Manson and his group were in the process of going up the river for the long stretch and I doubted they would be into trying to get Greg for anything, but he had built them into his comic book, *THE LEGION OF CHARLIES*, and he was having fantasies of knife-wielding women chasing his thin bones along the beach. That's what I had made the drive for: to talk about the new comic book, take some pictures--the usual. I stood around, looked at the giant barn/hanger Greg was living and working in, made small talk, took a picture of Greg and Veitch in a pair of brown paper bags with weird faces drawn on them by Greg. I wouldn't use the picture and I was rather bugged about the whole thing. I mean, Greg could have said he didn't want to talk and spared me that horrible drive.

I had heard things about Greg. He had a bit part in Tom Donahue's *Medicine Ball Caravan*. He had come to the Bay Area at the end of the sixties hoping to break into the rock scene, then decided there were too many guitar players about so he would try his hand at the art business by doing some posters for the Family Dog. Jaxon was art director for Chet Helms and he assigned Greg a few gigs then turned him on to the comix, particularly to *SKULL*. Greg did a cover and some illos for *TOM VEITCH'S MAGAZINE* which led to a collaboration between them. A lot of parody horror stories followed, some of them in *SKULL*, some in *SLOW DEATH FUNNIES*. The scene was political back then and everyone was polarized. You were either opposed to the war in Viet Nam and to the draft or you were considered one of the "Establishment." You were hip or you were straight, and around Haight-Ashbury and Berkeley, you didn't want to be known as "straight." Now, straight means you're hetero and not gay, but it didn't mean that in 1969, not to young people like Irons. A lot of guys were going to Viet Nam and getting killed or turned into rice paddy junkies. Irons and Veitch did a comic about one of these guys who returns home.

So Greg was paranoid that day in Stinson Beach

and once I knew all the details, I understood his reticence. A few years after that, I ran into Greg in Berkeley at one of the comic stores. He was living in Albany, working on another *SLOW DEATH* story, plugging some t-shirts he had just done, and thinking about getting seriously into tattoo art. He told me about meeting a lot of the best tattoo people at a

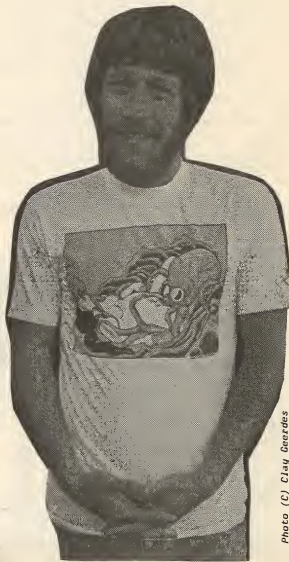


Photo (C) Clay Geerdes

GREG IRONS

convention. Said he was waiting on some needles and inks. He wasn't happy. He wasn't really satisfied with his life. He had not made a living with his art, and like most of the underground artists, he was still largely ignored by those who wrote about the medium. Everyone knew Crumb and Shelton, but the others, well, it was difficult. Greg was thinking then that he was already in his thirties and he still hadn't made it. His career was nowhere. The comic were drying up. All of this comes out in his stories about Gregor.

A couple of years drifted by. I saw Irons from time to time. I knew he was tattooing, saw him at a tattoo con in Sacramento, at a couple of tattoo parlor parties, but I knew he still wasn't happy. He was tattooing and making pretty good money, but he wasn't doing the kind of body art the men he admired did. Most of the time, Greg was doing butterflies, roses, and small flowers on the hips and pubes of biker "chicks." It was money, but it was boring, and for Greg, it was on a par with the coloring books he did for Bellerophon. The young man who had come to California to make his fortune, to join the rock stars, to be someone, was still on the fringe. It didn't surprise me when I learned that he had split up with the woman he lived with in Albany and gone to Seattle.

It did surprise me when I received a call in

November '84 telling me Greg Irons was dead, that he had been hit by a bus while on a tour in the Far East where he had gone to increase his knowledge of tattoo art. I felt sad as one does during such moments, then I thought about Greg's unpublished story, the one about his accident which is still to come out in SLOW DEATH FUNNIES #11. Was this a trial run? Was he accident prone? I can see Greg right now, grinning at me as he lights a Camel from a pack that has "CANCER" written on it, a gag he put into some issue of SLOW DEATH. Well, he was right. Cancer never got him like it did Dave Sheridan. I remember Greg doing little Gregor sketches in San Diego a couple of years ago and some women laughing and telling me Greg was doing a tattoo on her in her room. A belly dancer showed me her foot one day and told me the dragon on it was done by Irons. I would have known that anyway; Irons had a distinctive style. No one draws quite like he did.

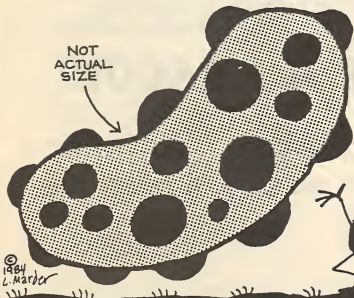
But someone will. Right now somewhere there is a kid looking at a copy of SKULL #6 or SLOW DEATH or DEVIANT SLICE and when he finishes laughing hysterically at those great stories, he may feel the desire to try to draw one of those characters, and in that moment Greg will be recreated and his work will go on.

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In issue #7, a back-up series called "Missing Beings" begins, written by Henry Vogel and drawn by Bill Neville. It's off to a very promising start, and Bill's art is excellent, making *Southern Knights* even more worthwhile. Check it out.

—Don Thompson
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Dear Mr. Yarber,

You recently reviewed "The Chronicles of Panda Khan" in TW #17, and we would like to respond.

First, the panda do not worship the Greek god Pan; they worship a being based on the Chinese mythological Pan Ku. He who mothers told their children when asked who had made the stars and sun:

"Pan Ku made it all...Pan Ku stood in the midst of it all with a chisel and a mallet and he shaped the heavens and hewed out the earth...When Pan Ku died...his head became the mountains, his breath the wind and clouds, his voice the thunder, his blood the rivers, his flesh the soil." (From *The Pageant of Chinese History* by E. Seeger)

We had hoped the first appearance of the Jinshin Mushi would clue the reader to the fact that there was more to Pan than the panda knew.

As for the mixture of technology and "magic" or mysticism, when primitive peoples have historically encountered technology beyond their means, they have tended to think magic. (For example: South Sea Islanders who worshiped grass replicas of cargo planes, or American Indians who called the locomotive "iron horse.") What one people call "God" may be just the sun to another culture. Just as the Hebrew god appeared to Moses as a burning bush, so does Pan "appear" to the panda in a way they can define. He created the Brotherhood of Pan, but did he do so by breathing on a lump of clay or by genetic engineering? Is Shibo's ability to move inanimate objects "magic" or is it telekinesis? We believe that the powers of the human mind have not been fully discovered or explored and that perhaps a highly disciplined mind might someday accomplish acts we today would call magic.

Your criticisms pointed out that there was much we could have done, but we were limited to 20 pages by Comico's restrictions and we felt that this universe we created can stand future visits.

Our best wishes to TW on the New York move.

Yours truly,

Monica & Dave Garcia
Holtville, CA

Review columnist Eric Yarber replies:

Your explanation makes the premise of your strip much clearer. Oriental mythology isn't as well known in this country as the western variety, however, and Pan is one of the better known figures from the Greco-Roman tradition. If I (and probably a high percentage of readers) see a god named "Pan," the impulse is not to search for another god named Pan. The little bit of the character I saw in the first story wasn't enough to make me wonder about his origins. Remember, your readers may not have done the research that you have done.

As regards the magic/technology shifts, I can

understand your point, but within the story it seems to make the premise just that much foggier. You may have tried to put too much information into your first story, with the result that the technological explanation came before readers had much of a chance to see the magical one. Things may clear up later, but I only had one story to go by.

Dear Diana,

Quite enjoyed John's provocative little column in TW #18. Probably won't do much good though. Archie, First, Marvel and Star just keep on rolling, delivering the goods month after month. And those who have been dragging their heels will continue along their carefully charted course to destruction. It may be "no way to run a business" but it's certainly state of the art these days, eh? As for who is causing the delays, rather than blame the writers and artists first, how about heaping much of the blame on lackadaisical publishers who continue to employ indolent editors who fail to exercise sound business judgement? At a long ago editorial meeting I attended, which was called to address this very problem, I observed a circle-jerk not unlike the infamous Thomas Nast Boss Tweed cartoon, in which the heel-draggers attempted to foist the blame for late books on an out-of-state colist.

Here's a memorable quote from Steve Ditko which is seven or eight years old. And might well have been written yesterday.

"People in a falling business rarely see themselves as contributing to the failure. Self-blindness is a protective device. Some people believe that if they have a title or position (publisher, editor, artist, writer, etc.), this automatically makes them competent in whatever they do or will do. Whatever criticism is levelled at the causes of the business failure, it is automatically unfair when it is directed at them.

"Yes, they believe others are making mistakes, causing problems, contributing to the decline, but they 'know' that whatever they do, it is not their fault when things go wrong.

"The toughest part of comics today is not identifying the problem, discovering the causes or figuring out solutions. The toughest part is reaching the people who do not want to be reached."

Yours,

Robin Snyder
Danbury, CT

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That's it for now folks. Address all letters of comment to: THE TELEGRAPH WIRE, 69 Carnation Road, Levittown, NY, 11756.
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